

Appendix N. Project Description

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Assessing SNAP Participants' Fitness for Work

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Assessing SNAP Participants' Fitness for Work

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has contracted with MEF Associates and its subcontractor, Mathematica, to conduct a study to better understand how States determine whether individuals are exempted from work requirements or have good cause for not meeting work requirements due to a physical or mental limitation. Although FNS provides guidelines to States on how to make these determinations, the study team is interested in understanding how States implement those guidelines.

The findings from this study will provide FNS with valuable insights into how States develop and implement policies and procedures for making fitness for work determinations. This information can help FNS assess States' needs for technical assistance around fitness for work issues and identify lessons learned to share across all State SNAP agencies.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims to document the policies, guidelines, and procedures used for making fitness for work determinations by all 53 State Agencies. It will also meet the following objectives by conducting additional in-depth data collection in four States:

- Determine if there are any general patterns and trends in fitness for work and good cause determinations within and across States.
- Determine how caseworkers and eligibility staff implement the State's fitness for work and good cause determination policies and requirements, and the challenges they face in applying the policy.

STUDY COMPONENTS

The key project activities the study team is undertaking to answer these questions are:

- **Document review.** The study team will collect and review documentation, both publicly available and internal State documents, related to policy, guidelines, and procedures for making fitness for work determinations for all 53 State Agencies. The review will include documents such as policy manuals, State plans for operating their SNAP employment and training program, training materials and desk guides for eligibility workers, and other guidance on State websites.
- **Web-based survey of 53 State agencies.** The study team will conduct a web-based survey of SNAP Directors and staff in all 53 State agencies to document policies, guidelines, and procedures used for making fitness for work determinations. As part of the survey request, the team will also collect documents from States that have not publicly published their guidance documents relating to fitness for work determinations.
- **Case studies of four States.** FNS will select four States for case studies. These case studies will provide an in-depth understanding of how caseworkers interpret and implement their State policies and guidance for making fitness for work determinations. For each State, the case studies will comprise:
 - o **Site visits.** The study team will conduct site visits over a few days. Each visit will include interviews with State leadership, local administrators, and

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eligibility and case management staff, as well as observations of eligibility interviews.

- o **Administrative data analysis.** The study team will request a limited amount of administrative data from the State and conduct analyses to explore patterns in fitness for work determinations. The study team will use data from the U.S. Census Bureau on community characteristics to complement administrative data from the State.

The final report, anticipated to be published in 2023, will present findings from the study. For more information, please reach out to FNS' Project Officer, Eric Williams (Eric.Williams@usda.gov), or MEF Associates' Project Director, Mary Farrell (Mary.Farrell@mefassociates.com).